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**PAUL'S POLEMIC AGAINST THE LAW
IN GALATIANS 3**

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ABBREVIATION

Gen	Genesis	ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
Deut	Deuteronom	ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary
Exod	Exodus	B.C.E	Before Common Era
Lev	Leviticus	BGAD	A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early (W. Bauer, F. William Danker) Christian Literature, 3 rd Edition
Hab	Habakkuk	CE	Common Era
Acts	Acts of the Apostles	c.f	Compare
Rom	Romans	EDNT	Exegitcal Dictionary of the New Testament
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	e.g.	exempli gratia
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	HBD	Harper's Bible Dictionary
Gal	Galatians	i.e.	id est
Eph	Ephesians	ibid.	ibidem
Phil	Philippians	<i>NJBC</i>	<i>New Jerome Bible Commentary</i>
Col	Colossians	NPP	New Perspective on Paul
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	NRSV	New Reversed Standard Bible
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	NT	New Testament
1 Tim	1 Timothy	OT	Old Testament
		OPP	Old perspective on Paul
		<i>RSJ</i>	<i>Religious Studies Journal</i>
		SP	Sacra Pagina
		<i>TMSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
		TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
		V	verse
		vol	volume

INTRODUCTION

Dissertation writing is truly an agonizing experience. The pressures from all sides are enormous. The weaknesses of the researcher are great. The challenges are many. Yet, as they say, after an agonizing Good Friday comes a glorious Easter Sunday. That is how this researcher feels right now as he finally submits this humble work to the Faculty of Christian Studies.

To write about a theme in Paul's letters is partly inspired by the module/course on Pauline Letters and His Theology given by Prof. Arnold Monera. The researcher is of the firm belief that seminarians preparing for priestly ministry must be properly equipped with knowledge of Scriptures, which is the soul of Theology. Hence, when the time for dissertation writing came as a requirement for Practicum, this researcher thought of choosing a biblical theme. Prof. Monera, the Pauline specialist in the Faculty of Christian Studies, was in a way instrumental in suggesting to write on Gal 3 where one finds most of Paul's enigmatic pronouncements about the law. Then came the tedious process of searching for materials, reading and putting them in writing, revising several times every section submitted because of the researcher's inadequacy in the English language. The walk to Calvary was bumpy as the researcher had to learn the meticulous methodological procedure of doing exegetical study from his patient supervisor. It was like a healthy master-disciple relationship.

This research does not claim to be exhaustive treatment of Paul's polemic against the law in Gal 3. That could be an ideal future project. The writer is so grateful to many scholars, like E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, Frank Matera, Bernardita Dianzon, Pamela

Eisenbaum, just to name a few, who have hugely influenced his thoughts on the new approach of reading the Apostle Paul. To them this researcher is greatly indebted.

Lastly, the researcher wishes to thank his Dominican community in Macau for their unfailing understanding, encouragement, and support during the time of writing. Words of thanks are due likewise to all the faculty members of Christian Studies through these four years. Most of all, he expresses his deep gratitude for the supervision of Prof. Monera whose critical remarks, incisive suggestions, and most importantly his friendship, brought about the realization of this humble work. To all of those who have contributed to this work, εὐχαριστῶ πάρα πολύ.

CHAPTER ONE

Paul's Letter to the Galatians: A Nutshell

The body of New Testament writings whose authorship is ascribed to Paul is known as *Corpus Paulinum* (Pauline Corpus). Traditionally, fourteen letters were counted as part of the Pauline Corpus, Hebrews included.¹ However, today “there can be no doubt that the letter to the Hebrews did not originate with Paul.”² Of the remaining thirteen letters, only seven are accepted today by both Catholic and Protestant scholars as authentically and undisputedly written by Paul (also called *Homologoumena*).³ The Letter to the Galatians belongs to these letters which are also called “Proto-Pauline.” That Galatians is genuinely Pauline is indisputable. There is no question as to the unity of this letter; “it is just one letter, written completely at one time, to address one problem.”⁴ Pauline commentators “agree that the Apostle wrote to the Galatians in response to a severe crisis.”⁵ Both external and internal evidences give credence to the letter.

The angry Paul in Galatians. Each of the genuine letters gives us different glimpses of Paul. In Galatians, we encounter Paul “at his most difficult and exhilarating”⁶ circumstance. With the exception of 2 Corinthians, the tone of Paul in Galatians has become

¹ These include Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews. It is interesting to note that “in the West, Hebrews was not regarded as Pauline until the fourth century... Cyprian does not mention it; Ambroasiaster knows it but does not attribute it to Paul; Irenaeus and Hippolytus who knew Hebrew, dispute that it was written by Paul” (see Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee, Revised & Enlarged English Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 393.

² *Ibid.*, 387.

³ These are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 303.

⁵ See Frank Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina, 9; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 1.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 327.

passionate, emotional, polemical and even angry. In the letter we see Paul in the face of rejection and opposition; he is the target of an attack which prompted a personal response.⁷ Raymond Brown begins his commentary of the Letter to the Galatians with these words, “In some ways this has been considered the most Pauline of the Pauline writings, the one in which anger has caused Paul to say what he really thinks.”⁸ In airing out his sentiments to the Galatians, Paul has become less diplomatic. The Apostle’s anger in this letter is evident at the outset. Notice that Paul’s customary expression of Thanksgiving in his letters (that is, thanking God for the congregation) is missing in Galatians and replaced with “I am astonished (θαυμάζω) that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel...” (Gal 1:6). It is likewise noteworthy to see how Paul polemically starts the letter: “Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ ...” (Gal 1:1). That was not how he introduced himself in the other genuine letters. Paul accused the congregation of ἀνόητοι (“foolish”; some translate as “stupid”) and is saddened by their indecisiveness: “I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted” (Gal 4:11). One commentator aptly describes that “Paul’s language even descends to the level of bad taste when he calls for the self-castration of those who are disturbing his congregation (5:12).”⁹ Paul daringly ends the letter: “From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body” (Gal 6:17).

⁷ Perhaps it is worthwhile to note that it is only here in Galatians (with the exception of Romans) where Paul does not name a co-sender. Since his person is under attack in Galatia, there is a need for him to make a personal response.

⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 467.

⁹ Matera, *Galatians*, 1.

Yet it must be made clear that in Galatians Paul was by no means simply pouring out raw emotion. Luke Timothy Johnson explains, “Its polemic is not random but carefully aimed, and the largest part of Galatians is a carefully constructed argument.”¹⁰

Audience of the Letter. Paul’s letter is addressed ταις ἐκκλησιαῖς τῆς Γαλατίας (“to the churches of Galatia”). This indicates that the Apostle is not merely writing to a single community but to a number of congregations in Galatia. Many commentators recognize that there has been a vigorous debate about the location of these congregations, since

Galatia can refer either to a *territory* in the north of Asia Minor, where the ethnic Galatians (a people of Celtic origin) settled near the cities Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium, or to the Roman *province* of Galatia, which included this territory but also extended southward to include the cities that Paul and Barnabas visited on their first missionary journey: Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13:4-14:28).¹¹

The former was referring to a small territory inhabited by a people who were, by race, Celtic located in the north (known to scholars as “North Galatian hypothesis”); while the latter referred to an extended Roman province which included people who were not ethnically Galatians, but were called Galatians because they lived in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia established by Paul during his first missionary journeys (also called “South Galatian hypothesis”).¹² To whom then did Paul write? Who were the Galatians that

¹⁰ Johnson, *The Writing of the New Testament*, 328.

¹¹ Matera, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2079. The “territory” hypothesis is also known as the “North Galatian hypothesis”, while the “province” theory is called the “South Galatian hypothesis”. See Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 296, and G. Walter Hansen, “Letter to the Galatians,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne *et al.* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 323-326, for a detailed discussion of the recipients of the letter.

¹²The “South Galatian theory” was first proposed by J. J. Schmidt in 1748 and was later espoused by E. Renan, T. Zahn, and W. M. Ramsay. It is still upheld by some scholars today, like Hansen (“Letter to the Galatians,” 326) who says: “The weight of evidence seems to be in favor of a south Galatian location.” According to this theory, Paul would have written to the churches of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. For a

he was addressing in the letter? Scholars are divided regarding the geographical location of these churches. More and more scholars, however, are of the opinion that Galatians was written to the ethnic Galatians (old Celtic tribes in the interior of Asia Minor) living in the actual Galatian land, whose territory Paul passed through during his second (Acts 16:6) and third (Acts 18:23) missionary journeys.¹³ It can be gathered from the letter itself that the members of the Galatian congregations were predominantly, if not exclusively, Gentile converts.

Dating of the Letter. The above discussion on the North and South Galatian hypotheses is relevant for the dating of the letter. On one hand, those who favor the South Galatian hypothesis require an earlier dating of the letter. On the other hand, if the North Galatian hypothesis is supported, i.e., the letter was addressed to the ethnic Galatians evangelized by Paul during his second and third missionary journeys, then the dating would be in the mid-fifties.¹⁴ According to Fitzmyer, the letter to the Galatians “belongs to the period of Paul’s major struggle with the Judaizers in the early church, when he also wrote 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Rom, and probably Phil.”¹⁵ This dating is also favored because of the letter’s thematic resemblance to Romans. The letter to the Romans was likewise written in the mid-fifties. It is held that Paul wrote Galatians from Ephesus.

The Crisis at Galatia. Paul had proclaimed the gospel (perhaps twice) to the Gentiles who now comprised the churches of Galatia. His description of his first visit to Galatia

detailed discussion, see Joseph Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Student Edition, eds. Raymond E. Brown et al. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 780 and Matera, *Galatians*, 19.

¹³ Supported by Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 297-298; Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” 781; Matera, *Galatians*, 19-20; idem, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” 2079; Karris, “The Letter to the Galatians,” 584, among others. Erhman is non-committal as to the identity of the recipients: “...we do not know to which churches Paul sent the letter...” (*The New Testament*, 305).

¹⁴ See Matera, *Galatians*, 20.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” 781.

shows that he went there because of a physical infirmity, and instead of being scorned or despised they generously received him as if he were an angel of God (Gal 4:13-14).¹⁶ Paul highly esteemed them, to the extent that he called them his “own dear children” (4:19). Relationships, however, changed shortly after Paul’s second visit to them. He learned in Ephesus that after his departure the churches in Galatia were infiltrated by some “troublemakers” who impugned his authority as an apostle (1:1, 12) apparently on the basis that his commission did not come from Christ. Moreover, they claimed that the gospel he preached was not the true gospel (1:7) because he did not insist on the observance of Mosaic Law. These “intruders” or “agitators” had *bewitched* (Greek verb: βασκαίνω /infinitive: βασκαίνειν¹⁷ = “to put someone under a spell”) the Galatian Gentile Christians into entertaining another gospel different from the one preached by Paul. This is the occasion that caused Paul to write the Galatian congregations. His letter, which is very personal and polemical in tone, was thus meant to address the crisis in the Galatian congregations¹⁸ and at the same time to rebuke the Galatian believers for abandoning “the truth of the Gospel” (1:6) which he planted on them.

The Opponents of Paul. But who were these “intruders” or “agitators” in Galatia? Although Paul never fully identified the “troublemakers” by name, it can be surmised that they were Jewish Christians, most probably from Jerusalem, who deeply revered the Mosaic Law.¹⁹ This group of teachers or missionaries is urging the Galatians to submit to

¹⁶ The exact nature of Paul’s physical illness is not disclosed in the text.

¹⁷ This is the only appearance of βασκαίνω / βασκαίνειν in the New Testament.

¹⁸ According to Matera (*Galatians*, 1), all commentators agree that Paul wrote to the Galatians in response to a severe crisis, although they disagree about the precise circumstances which occasioned the letter.

¹⁹ There had been a variety of hypothesis as to the identity of the agitators: (1) they were Jewish Christians from Jerusalem; (2) they were Gentile Christians, or Jewish Christians, but from Galatia; (3) they were Gnostics, or syncretistic Jewish Christians, their place of origin not being of primary importance; (4) they were legalists (from Jerusalem) and pneumatics (from Galatia) of a libertine tendency. See Hans Dieter Betz, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 328 and Matera, *Galatians*, 2 as to the identity of the opponents of Paul in

circumcision and embrace the Mosaic Law as a prerequisite to full admission into the covenant community of Abraham's descendants. As Jewish Christians "they believed in Jesus as the Messiah and were prepared to welcome Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel, provided they were circumcised and observed the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law."²⁰ These Jewish Christians deemed that the blessings of God belonged only to those of Jewish descent.²¹ And the only way to belong to the Jewish nation was to subscribe to the mandatory statutes of the Jewish people, i.e., being circumcised, observing the Sabbath and obeying the Mosaic Law. In short, the version of Christianity these intruding missionaries put across to the Galatians can be summarized in these words: "Jesus was the Messiah of Israel; Gentiles who wish to share in the benefits of Israel's Messiah must become descendants of Abraham through circumcision, the sign of the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham (Gen 17:13)."²² If these intruders were preaching a different gospel from that of Paul, then in effect they are indeed undermining the very authority of Paul. This can be inferred from Gal 1:1-5 where Paul underscores that his call to be an apostle is from Jesus Christ and not from human beings.²³ It is probable that the "intruders" were saying that the gospel Paul is preaching to the Galatians is of human origin.²⁴ This is perhaps the reason, according to Fr.

Galatia. Most commentators hold that the "agitators" were Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. Some authors regard them as Judaizers (e.g., Edwin D. Freed, *The New Testament: A Critical Introduction*, Third Edition [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001], 273), although this is now avoided by many contemporary scholars.

²⁰ Matera, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians," 2079.

²¹ Hansen, "Letter to the Galatians," 327.

²² Matera, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians," 2079. It is true that the teaching of the Galatian "agitators" could only be reconstructed from Paul's reaction in the Letter to the Galatians.

²³ It is interesting to note that in the other genuine letters, Paul does not need to insist that his gospel did not come to him from human agency or human tradition, even that of Cephas (Peter), but from divine revelation.

²⁴ In F. F. Bruce's reconstruction of the Galatian crisis, the intruders who were coming from the Jerusalem church, might have swayed the Galatian Christians into believing that "the Jerusalem leaders are the only persons with authority to say what the true gospel is, and this authority they received direct from Christ. Paul had no comparable authority: any commission he exercises was derived by him from the Jerusalem leaders, and if he differs from them on the content or implications of the gospel, he is acting and teaching quite arbitrarily" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

Robert J. Karris, why Paul in the first two chapters of Galatians “argues mightily that his gospel came from divine revelation and not from the earlier apostles, who, indeed, did not force him to alter his gospel.”²⁵

The Letter to the Galatians as Paul’s Response to the Crisis. The Letter to the Galatians is a situational letter where the Apostle is painstakingly *rebuking* (begins at 1:6) and *requesting* (commences at 4:12) his Galatian converts.²⁶ Paul is rebuking the Galatian believers for being foolish to be swayed by these intruders and thus perverting the Gospel of Christ that he preached and which they accepted in faith. At the same time, beginning at 4:12 he is requesting them not to abandon him, but “to imitate him inasmuch as he no longer relies on the Law to be justified but on the saving grace of Christ.”²⁷ Paul wants them to realize the ill effects of the “intruders”: (1) these outsiders have disturbed the equilibrium of the Galatians; (2) their disturbance has endangered the gospel message preached by Paul and thereby perverting the gospel of Christ; (3) these outsiders were cunning, deceptive and hypocritical to the point of bewitching them; (4) circumcision and observance of the Law are central to the teachings of the intruders which contradicts Paul’s teaching that Galatian Christians are not justified by doing the works of the Law but by entrusting themselves to what God has accomplished in Christ (2:16).

It can be inferred from the letter itself that these “intruders” asserted that the Galatian Christian males had to be circumcised (5:2; 6:12-13) and that all Galatian Christians had to observe the Jewish Law (3:2; 4:21; 5:4) to be true Christians. In responding to the Galatian crisis Paul exhorts them to turn away from this lie. He endeavors to expound on the purpose

²⁵ Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., “The Letter to the Galatians,” in Daniel Durken, ed. *New Testament* (New Collegeville Bible Commentary; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 584.

²⁶ According to Karris, the master plan of Galatians is that of an R&R letter: rebuke and request (ibid., 582).

²⁷ Matera, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” 2086.

of the Law and clarifies any misunderstanding about its temporary intention. Paul emphasizes that it is a fallacy that obedience to the Law could bring them salvation. Paul likewise clarifies to the Galatians the Old Testament account of Abraham and proves that justification comes by faith in Jesus.

Although the Letter is short, consisting only of six chapters, it is well crafted and structured. This apologetic letter can be outlined as follows²⁸:

- I. Letter Opening: Paul announces the main points of his argument (1:1-10)
- II. Letter Body: Paul explains why the Galatians should not accept circumcision and place themselves under the Law (1:11 – 6:10)
 - A. Paul employs autobiographical information to defend and explain his circumcision-free Gospel (1:11 - 2:21)
 - B. Paul explains that people of faith are Abraham's offspring (3:1 – 5:12)
 - C. Abraham's offspring in Christ live according to the Spirit and fulfill the Law through the Love commandment (5:13 – 6:10)
- III. Letter Closing: Summary of the Main Points of Paul's argument (6:11-18)

To end this chapter, Paul's letter to the Galatians, borrowing the description of Matera, "has been, and remains, one of the most influential documents of the New Testament."²⁹ Because of the crisis in Galatia, Paul was forced to expound extensively his doctrine of justification by faith apart from the Law. Again, to appropriate Fitzmyer's words, Galatians "became the first exposé of Paul's teaching about justification by grace through faith apart from deeds prescribed by the Law; it is Paul's manifesto about Christian freedom."³⁰

²⁸ While commentators have different ways of outlining Galatians, this paper is closely following the outline of Matera ("The Letter of Paul to the Galatians," 2080) because of its simplicity but with some modifications.

²⁹ Matera, *Galatians*, 26.

³⁰ Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," 781.

CHAPTER TWO

GALATIANS 3 IN ITS CONTEXT

After having a glimpse of the wider context of the Galatians in the chapter, this present chapter focuses now on Galatians 3, which is the concern of our investigation. This section delves on investigating the following concerns in Gal 3: situating the immediate context, a semantic analysis of some key words, and Paul's line of thought.

A. Immediate Context of Galatians 3

Knowing the "context" is crucial in biblical interpretation. Context not only influences interpretation but likewise determines its meaning. What is the immediate context of Galatians 3? Based on Matera's structure of Galatians, Gal 3 belongs to the body of the letter which starts in Gal 1:11 and ending in 6:10. In this section Paul is arguing why the Galatians should not accept circumcision and place themselves under the Law as prerequisites for becoming Christian believers. As we have noted earlier we see an angry Paul in the letter to the Galatians. He seems to be the main target of the attack of his opponents in Galatia and the letter to the Galatians is Paul's angry, emotionally loaded personal response. That Paul is indeed angry and in a defensive mood is shown by the absence of a co-sender and a usual Thanksgiving portion of the Letter.¹ After the Apostle Paul left having established the churches of Galatia, other "missionaries" came there and caused problems. These Christian agitators discredited the apostle, troubled Paul's Gentile

¹ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 471, writes: "Of the seven undisputed Pauline letters, if we leave aside Rom which was sent to a community that Paul had not evangelized, Gal is the only one of the remaining six in which Paul had not name a co-sender."

converts and wanted them to be circumcised and to obey the Mosaic law.² Thus, in the opening of the Letter (Gal 1:1-10), Paul insists on his status as an apostle sent by God and expresses his disappointment that the Galatians are deserting the gospel that he preached to them.

In Gal 1:11–2:5 Paul asserts that his gospel was given him by revelation from Christ and that “his gospel was approved and recognized by the primitive church in Jerusalem and by the original apostles.”³ He also “points to a division of labor, with Peter at work as apostle to the Jews, while he was the apostle to the Gentiles, apparently with the implication that Gentiles would not be required to keep the Mosaic law (2:6-10).”⁴ When Peter visited Antioch, “Paul had even demonstrated in an encounter with the leading original apostle the latter’s dependence on human beings and had defended the truth of the law-free gospel (2:11-21).”⁵ Thus, the first two chapters of Galatians are an autobiographical account and a defense of Paul’s position.

From Gal 3:1–4:31, also called *probatio* (“proofs”) by other scholars, Paul presents the major proofs or arguments from experience and Scripture to justify his theological position convincing the foolish Galatians who have allowed themselves to be bewitched:⁶

² Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search For The Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL /Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19.

³ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 9th printing 1990), 295.

⁴ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 289.

⁵ Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 295.

⁶ See Hans Dieter Betz, “Epistle to the Galatians,” in *ABD* 2 (1992): 872-875, esp. 873 and Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 472. Specifically, Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” *NJBC*, 785-788, identifies six proofs from Gal 3:1 – 4:33. It is fair to say that Paul’s numerous citations from Scripture may indicate that the intruders in Galatia appealed to the sacred tradition of Judaism to support their claim or position.

The *first* proof (3:1-5) is an argument from human experience, that is, the Galatians have received the Spirit on the basis of their faith, and not because of their observance of the Torah. These five verses allow us to have a glimpse of the preaching of Paul's opponents, who are championing "the works of the law," especially circumcision. Undeniably, "Paul's rebuke of the foolishness of the Galatians is harsh."⁷ He had to painfully remind them how he preached Christ crucified which elicited their faith – a faith that did not come from "the works of the law," about which they had not yet heard until the opponents came to disturb their faith. Paul's conclusion is based on the Galatians' actual experience: The gift of God's Spirit that they all received did not come to them from their performance of "the works of the law."

The *second* proof (3:6-14) employs argument from Scripture, like using the story and example of Abraham (Gen 15:5; 12:3; 18:18) and other testimonies from Scripture (Deut 27:26; Hab 2:4; Lev 18:5) to show that those who are believers are the "sons of Abraham" and the heirs of the promise.⁸ Against those agitators who insist on the necessity of circumcision of Abraham, Paul cites "God's promise that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3) – a promise independent of circumcision – so that in giving the Spirit to the uncircumcised Gentiles through faith, God is fulfilling the promise to Abraham, a man whose faith was reckoned as righteousness (Gen 15:6)."⁹ Paul's opponents presumably cited Deut 27:26 ("Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.") in order to warn the Galatians that non-observance of the Torah results in a curse.

⁷ Robert J Karris, OFM, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009): 581- 601, esp. 589.

⁸ Hans Dieter Betz, "Epistle to the Galatians," in *ABD* 2 (1992): 872-875.

⁹ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 472.

Hence, Paul's response is that those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. But Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal 3:13).

In the *third* proof (3:15-25) Paul further builds his argument about the deficiency of the law by using the experience of Abraham and God's promise to him and to his offspring.¹⁰ For Paul, "God's promises had a singular descendant in view: Christ."¹¹ In this section, Paul insists that the promise of God is superior to the Law because the latter was given 430 years after the promise (see Exod 12:40). The Law, which came much later, could not alter or annul the original terms of God's promise, which was faith.¹² The promises God made to Abraham and his descendant constituted a covenant which cannot be altered by Law. Thus, in Gal 3:19-20 Paul sees the Law as being inferior to the promises. "It [Law] was added to the promises to increase, or to deal with, *transgressions*... Its role was temporary, and unlike the promises made directly to Abraham, it was given through a *mediator* (Moses)."¹³ Yet it must be made clear that the Law, though inferior, is not opposed to the promises. The Law, however, was never intended to give life, that is, to justify (Gal 3:21); only Christ, the singular offspring of Abraham, could set us free from the power of sin. If there is any value of Law, it is to serve as a temporary custodian and disciplinarian (*παιδαγωγός*), until the coming of Christ.¹⁴

¹⁰ Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *NJBC*, 785.

¹¹ See Matera, "The letter of Paul to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 2084.

¹² See Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 472.

¹³ Matera, "The letter of Paul to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 2085.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 289.

In the *fourth* proof (Gal 3:26 - 4:11) Paul is reminding the Galatian Christians of their experience as children of God through faith by virtue of Christ's redeeming work.¹⁵ Since Christ is Abraham's singular offspring, "those who have been baptized into Christ are Abraham's descendants, apart from circumcision or any other works of the Law."¹⁶ Hence, in Christ, distinctions of race, class and gender are insignificant: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). Paul seems to argue that if the Galatians have already achieved the status of being children of God through his son Christ Jesus, why then do they still want to go back to their former status of slaves of elemental spirits?¹⁷

The *fifth* proof (Gal 4:12-20) is from the experience of the Galatians in their relation to Paul.¹⁸ At the beginning of Paul's first visit to the Galatian churches, the Galatian believers have received his gospel with so much joy and treated Paul extremely well, as in an angel. However, now as relationships have changed, he is asking the Galatians how he had become their enemy, as the troublemakers would make him.¹⁹ In dismay he encourages them to imitate him inasmuch as he no longer relies on the Law to be justified but on the saving grace of Christ.

In the *sixth* proof (Gal 4:21-31) Paul argues that there are two lines of descent from Abraham, one by Hagar (slave woman and mother of Ishmael), the other by Sarah (wife of

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *NJBC*, 785; Carson et al., *An introduction to the New Testament*, 289.

¹⁶ Matera, "The letter of Paul to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 2085.

¹⁷ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 472; Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *NJBC*, 787.

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *NJBC*, 788.

¹⁹ See Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 472; Carson et al., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 289.

Abraham and mother of Isaac).²⁰ The child of the slave woman (Hagar) was born according to the flesh; while the child of the free woman (Sarah) was born through the promise. Speaking allegorically, according to Paul, the two women represent two covenants. Hagar is the covenant of the *law* made at Sinai; while Sarah is the covenant of *promise* that was made to Abraham and represents freedom. Paul linked the Jews with the son of Hagar, and hence are slaves and will not share in the freedom; while the (Christian) believers are the children of promise fulfilled in Isaac, son of the free woman; they have freedom and are not under ritualistic requirements of the Law.²¹ Paradoxically, Paul in Gal 4:28-31 applies the allegory to the Galatians, who because they are children of the free woman should expel the children of the slave woman – that is, the intruding missionaries in Galatia.²² By appealing to the Old Testament, Paul argues that “in Christ God’s new freedom reigns. To adopt the practices of the Judaizers is to forfeit this Christian freedom.”²³

After presenting these six proofs, Paul concludes this long section, which begun in Gal 3:1, by warning the Galatians what will happen if they become circumcised, namely, Christ will be of no benefit to them, and they will fall from grace (Gal 5:1-12).²⁴ In this

²⁰ Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” *NJBC*, 788. The intruders in their argument against Paul may have referred to the two children of Abraham: Isaac, son of Sarah and Ishmael, son of Hagar. In their way of thinking, the offspring of Hagar is likened to those who failed to adhere to the law; while the offspring of Sarah are those observed the Torah and hence are the rightful heir. This hypothesis has been proposed by C. K. Barrett, “The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians,” *Rechtfertigung*, Ernst Käsemann, Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pöhlmann, and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976): 1-16, esp. 9.

²¹ Freed, *The New Testament: A Critical Introduction*, 279-280.

²² Matera, “The letter of Paul to the Galatians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 2086.

²³ Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians,” *NJBC*, 788-789.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2087; Brown, “The Letter to the Galatians,” *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 473.

concluding section, Paul exhorts the Galatians to remain free in Christ and should live in freedom and not undergo the circumcision that means bondage.²⁵

B. Semantic Analysis of Galatians 3

In order for us to understand better Paul's thought in Gal 3, key words will be identified and analyzed.

1. νόμος

The Greek word νόμος generally denotes "law," "a custom, rule, principle, norm."²⁶ It could also refer to "a collection of holy writings precious to God's people, sacred ordinance."²⁷ In its strict sense, it could represent the Torah, the work of Moses the lawgiver. In the wider sense, it signifies the Holy Scripture in its totality.

νομος occurs 195 times in the NT.²⁸ Out of 195 occurrences, 118 are employed in Paul's authentic letters (27 in Romans, 32 in Galatians, the rest in 1 Corinthians and Philippians).²⁹ In Galatians 3 alone, νόμος appears 15 times. This statistical data show indication how Paul is preoccupied with the law.³⁰ H. Hübner, however, reminds us, "A

²⁵ Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 289.

²⁶ W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 677. Hereafter called in this paper *BGAD*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 678.

²⁸ Hans Hübner, νόμος, *EDNT 2* (1991): 471-477, esp. 472.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ According to H.-J. Schoeps (*Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], 168; cited in Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *NJBC*, 785), Paul's attitude toward the law has been called "the most intricate doctrinal issue in his theology."

presentation of Paul's statements on the law cannot be separated from the biographical aspects of Paul's life."³¹ He concludes:

Therefore, the theme "Paul and the law" must be dealt with on two levels: that of his biography, which ought to be reconstructed primarily from his letters, and that of νομος statements in his letters, esp. Galatians and Romans. These two levels may not be separated when giving an account.³²

Heeding Hübner's advice, we have to look at Paul prior to his call to become an apostle to the Gentiles. As a Pharisee Paul was extremely zealous for the Law and the Traditions of their forefathers: "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:5-6). In Gal 1:14 Paul proudly confesses that he was "far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." Thus, prior to his so-called Damascus experience Paul was an extremely law fanatic. And by law here it refers to the "written Law and the oral Pharisaic interpretation of it."³³ If Paul persecuted the Christians it was because of their non-compliance with the Jewish νομος. Everything changed, however, in the light of the Damascus experience which made him see "the futility and aberration of his *Judaistic* understanding of the Law."³⁴ God has set him apart and through grace called him to be apostle to the Gentiles. His realization of "justification

³¹ Hübner, *EDNT* 2, 475.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Francis Pereira, S.J., *Gripped By God in Christ: The Mind and Heart of St. Paul* (Bandra, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2005), 47.

through faith and not through works of Law led him to the rediscovery of the original, *biblical* meaning and purpose of the Law.”³⁵

Law in the Old Testament and Judaism. How does the Christian Paul understand νόμος as it is used in his letters? The provenance of Paul’s thought on the Law is clearly the Old Testament and Judaism. Hence a brief excursus on these would be in order. In an article by A. Andrew Das contributed in a recent edited book entitled *Paul Unbound*, he explains the place of the Jewish Law in this way: “The demands of God’s Law were embedded within the gracious framework of God’s election and covenant relationship with the Jewish people.”³⁶ This means that for the Jews the Law was meant to be a consequence of the covenant made by God with Israel: “I am your God and you are my people”. This covenant relationship is the immediate foundation of the Israelite laws. In Deuteronomy 7:6-11 Moses reminds the people of Israel in these words:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people of his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandment, to a thousand generations. Therefore, observe diligently the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that I am commanding you today.

The Jews view the Law, or the rule of life, not as an imposition from God on the people, but “rather a *consequence* of the covenant relationship which exists between God and His

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ A. Andrew Das, “Paul and the Law: Pressure Points in the Debate,” in *Paul Unbound*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 99-116, esp. 100. This idea originally came from E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

people.”³⁷ Obedience and fidelity to the Law safeguards this covenant relationship; the Law is fundamental to Judaism’s sense of identity as God’s chosen people; it is an integral part of the covenant since it regulates the relation of the covenant people to the covenant God.³⁸ Hence, the Law is seen as a divine gift that shows God’s people how to live within that covenant (see Deut 4:1, 10; 5:29-33; 6:1-2, 18, 24; etc.) and what they should avoid so that the covenant is not undermined.

Scholars explain that the exile into Babylon (587-537 B.C.E.) brought a “major development and change in the attitude towards the Law, and consequently in the understanding of the Law.”³⁹ There was no more king; there was no more Temple. In Babylon they could not offer sacrifice. Their environment was totally pagan. The only thing that remained among the exiled Jews was their Law and its regulations. The Law became their only link with God. Consequently, the Sabbath became more important as a means of keeping Israel “holy” and distinct from other people. Circumcision became the distinguishing trademark of the people of the covenant since the Egyptians never practiced it. Religion, then, became centered on circumcision and the Law. This, according to Pereira, was the birth of Judaism and the Pharisees became the strictest sect of Judaism.⁴⁰ Whereas before the Law keeps the people in a continuing relation with God, from now on observance or doing the works of the Law establishes the relation with God. The Law in postexilic times became the means of salvation and guide of life for Jews. God’s acceptance or rejection of his people depended on their strict observance of the Law. “The pious Jews

³⁷ Pereira, *Gripped By God in Christ*, 48.

³⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*. Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2008), 174.

³⁹ Pereira, *Gripped By God in Christ*, 51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

thought that the Law was *the* means by which God himself wanted to justify him and to deliver him from sin.”⁴¹

It is in his letter to the Galatians that Paul for the first time pondered on the meaning of the law and justification. According to Heikki Räisänen, “Paul never defines the content of the term νόμος. He presupposes that the readers will know what he is talking about.”⁴² There is no doubt for Paul that the νόμος “is the decisive *separating* factor between Jews and Gentiles. Possession of the νόμος puts the Jews into a special class.”⁴³ Thus, Gal 2:15 reads, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.”

But how does Paul understand νόμος? Fitzmyer on his part observes that the concept of the νόμος in Paul’s letters carried with it various connotations or meanings:⁴⁴

- 1) It is used in a generic sense, “a law” (Gal 5:23; Rom 4:15b; 5:13; 7:1a);
- 2) Sometimes it is used in a figurative sense:
 - as a “principle” (Rom 3:27c; 7:21, 23a);
 - as a way to refer to “sin” (Rom 7:23c, 25b); or “sin and death” (Rom 8:2b)
 - as “human nature” (Rom 2:14d);
 - as a way of referring to “faith” (Rom 3:27b) or to “Christ” (Gal 6:2), or to the “Spirit” (Rom 8:2a).
- 3) On few instances, νόμος is used to refer to the Old Testament, either the Psalms (Rom 3:19a); the Prophets (1 Cor 14:21), or esp. the Torah (Gal 3:10b; 1 Cor 9:9 – the only place where Paul speaks of “the law of Moses”;

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴² See his book, *Paul and the Law* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 29; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Joseph Fitzmyer, “Pauline Theology,” in *NJBC*, 1403; also Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), 297.

- 4) About 97 times in all, Paul uses νόμος (with or without the article) to refer to the Law of Moses, the Sinaitic legislation (e.g., Gal 3:12f, 17, 19, 21a, 24). In Rom 7:7-12 νόμος and ἐντολή (commandment) are used interchangeably.

Hence, when Paul mentions in Gal 3:17, 19 that the law was given 430 years after the Abrahamic promise, he is not referring to the Pentateuch as a whole but to the Sinaitic legislation – the legislation that was accompanied by promises and sanctions. This is the law that can be kept, done, fulfilled, or transgressed. This law offers life to those who perform its commands (Gal 3:12), but it produces a curse on transgressors (Gal 3:10, 13).⁴⁵

To sum up, νόμος in Paul's usage, apart from a few cases, most often means the Sinaitic legislation, the sum of specific divine requirements given to Israel through Moses.⁴⁶ Thus, when Paul talks about νομος and the “works of the law” (ἔργα νόμου) in Gal 3 he is referring to the Mosaic law, the Sinaitic legislation, which separates the Jews from the rest of humankind. Moreover, as Westerholm argues, Paul “understands the Sinaitic legislation as comprised of commandments that need “doing,” and hence as based on works rather than faith.”⁴⁷

2. ΠΙΣΤΙΣ

The noun πίστις, which is translated as “that which elicits trust, faith,” occurs 243 times in the NT.⁴⁸ This word appears 91 times in Paul's authentic letters (40 in Romans, 22

⁴⁵ Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 299.

⁴⁶ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 16. According to Räisänen, “In Hebrew, the word *torah* came to be used with different overlapping meanings, as can be seen from the saying, ‘The *Torah* consists of the *Torah*, the Prophets and the Writings.’” See also Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 299.

⁴⁷ Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 297. In this book, Westerholm argues that the notion that the law demands works is Pauline thesis, not a Jewish misunderstanding.

⁴⁸ Out of the 243 occurrences of πίστις in the whole NT, Paul uses it 142 times in his letters (=58.43%). See John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, James A. Swanson, *The Greek English Concordance to the New Testament* (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 620-622; Gerhard Barth, πίστις, *EDNT* 3 (1993): 92. According to E. P. Sanders, “faith” best translates Paul's πίστις, since

in Galatians, the rest in 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, 1Thessalonians).⁴⁹ The frequency of the use and occurrence of this word would show that, according to Gerhard Barth, “we are dealing here with a central theological concept, one that represents the correct relationship to God and ultimately the essence of the Christian religion itself.”⁵⁰

The verb πιστεύω (“to believe,” “consider true, obey, or trust”) appears 42 times in Paul’s authentic letters. When Paul uses the verb πιστεύω it is often followed by the preposition ἐπὶ (“on”) or εἰς (“into”).⁵¹ This usage brings out the truth that Christians rest their faith “on” Jesus or are brought “into” union with him.⁵²

The noun πίστις and the verb πιστεύω are at the very center of Paul’s theological thinking because *trust* in God is of central importance for the Apostle.⁵³ These terminologies describe the believers’ appropriate relationship to God. When Paul uses them he is not referring to a shallow surface experience but truly believing in one’s heart. The focus of faith in Paul’s writings is the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and inaugurated the new age.⁵⁴ For Paul the consistent fundamental truth is that God has acted in Christ to bring about the salvation of sinners. According to Barth, the Apostle has taken

‘belief’ often connotes ‘opinion’, which is far from what Paul meant (*Paul: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 54).

⁴⁹Kohlenberger, Goodrick, and Swanson, *The Greek English Concordance to the New Testament*, 621.

⁵⁰ Gerhard Barth, πίστις, *EDNT* 3 (1993): 92. Barth further states that “only in the NT did ‘faith’ first become the central and comprehensive designation for one’s relationship to God” (93).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*, 95. Paul shows greater interest in the interpretation of the noun (πίστις) than of the verb (πιστεύω). This is shown by the frequency with which he uses πίστις.

⁵⁴ Leon Morris, “Faith,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 285-291, esp. 285.

over the general Christian meaning of faith as the “acceptance of the proclamation of God’s salvation activity in Christ.”⁵⁵ Let us take some examples:

Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9)

Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. (Gal 2:16)

Πίστις has many aspects or facets. For one, faith is “response to revelation as contrasted with discovery of new knowledge.”⁵⁶ It is human’s response to God who takes the initiative to reveal himself to us in human history. In the fullness of time God revealed himself through his Son, Jesus Christ, “whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1).

Faith is also the recognition that humans are sinners and in need of salvation. As previously mentioned, for Paul God has acted in Christ to bring about the salvation of sinners. This salvation, however, cannot be obtained or merited by man’s works; it must be received as a gift of grace. Sinners cannot earn or merit salvation; they can only trust God’s grace. Faith is the recognition that God in Christ has provided for our redemption. Thus, faith indeed is the acceptance of the proclamation of God’s salvation activity in Christ.

In Galatians 3 alone the noun πίστις is mentioned 14 times. Paul often presents it as antithetical to νόμος. Πίστις is contrasted to νόμος six times in Gal 3 (vv. 2, 5, 11, 12, 23, 24). To cite just two examples:

⁵⁵ Barth, πίστις, *EDNT* 3, 95.

⁵⁶ E .C. Blackman, “Faith, Faithfulness,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2 (1962): 222-234, esp. 222.

Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law (νόμος) or by believing (πίστις) what you heard? (Gal 3:2).

But the law (νόμος) does not rest on faith (πίστις); on the contrary, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.” (Gal 3:12).

In Gal 3:2 Paul seems to be reminding the Galatians that their experience of the Spirit came from *believing* in what they heard and not from doing the works of the Law (ἔργα νόμου).⁵⁷

In Gal 3:6 the Apostle is asserting that because Abraham *trusted* God, it was reckoned to him as righteousness. In similar vein, Paul in Gal 3:12 is arguing that, based on Leviticus 18:5, the law operates on the principle of doing or performance rather than by *faith*.⁵⁸ But in Paul’s belief, “Christ has freed us from the Law’s curse that we might enjoy the blessing of Abraham, the Spirit.”⁵⁹ Thus, there is no need for the Galatians to do the works of the Law as insisted by the intruding agitators. As Finlan explains, “Trust-faith makes one a child of Abraham.”⁶⁰

3. δικαιοσύνη

When one looks into a Greek concordance of the NT, he will be struck by the fact that that δικαιοσύνη (“justification”) and cognate words δικαιουσθαι (“to be pronounced and treated as righteous,” “be acquitted”), δικαίος (“just”) are pervasive in the Pauline letters.⁶¹

The term δικαιοσύνη, according Kertelge,

⁵⁷ Matera, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” 2084.

⁵⁸ Barth, πίστις, *EDNT* 3, 95.

⁵⁹ Matera, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” 2084.

⁶⁰ Stephen Finlan, *The Apostle Paul and the Pauline Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 83.

⁶¹ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 23.

appears 91 times in the NT, of which 57 are in the Pauline literature ... δικαιοσύνη belongs to the 'preferred words' of the Pauline letters. Indeed, the word represents one of Paul's most important theological concepts.⁶²

While it is true that δικαιοσύνη is right at the heart of the gospel, yet this key word is replete with a variety of nuances that makes its translation in English cumbersome. Thus, E. P. Sanders reminds us that modern English has two parents: Norman French and Anglo-Saxon.

In the dual vocabulary which its two parents afford English, words derived from Anglo-Saxon often have a common or earthly meaning, while those derived from French are more polite or sophisticated ... The dual parentage usually allows us to make fine distinctions and nuances.⁶³

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition δικαιοσύνη is translated as "righteousness", while in French it is rendered as "justification." Again, in Sanders' opinion, "the best translation of Paul's word *dikaiosyne* is the Anglo-Saxon 'righteousness', not the French 'justification', since 'justification' often carries the nuance of defensiveness or of a legal excuse, and we shall see that this was not Paul's meaning."⁶⁴ Of course, it cannot be denied that δικαιοσύνη carries with it legal connotation. Thus, in English the Greek noun δικαιοσύνη takes on a variety of usages: (1) in a broad sense "righteousness," (2) in a narrower sense, "justice," "justification." In the case of the verb δικαιοω, however, there is no longer an Anglo-Saxon equivalent, but only the French "justify". This only shows that finding the best English word/s to use for δικαιοσύνη and its derivatives is not easy.

Doing a semantic analysis of δικαιοσύνη makes one realize that it is polyvalent, that is, it has a number of different meanings in various contexts. It has legal, political, ethical and religious connotations.

⁶² Karl Kertelge, δικαιοσύνη, *EDNT* 1 (1993): 326.

⁶³ Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*, 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

In first century Rome, for instance, the word means justice. In a number of Alexandrian and Roman coins the goddess δικαιοσύνη with scales appeared as an attribute of *Aequitas*, “equality/fairness/justice personified.”⁶⁵ Given the situation of political and economic hardships, the emperor is expected to rule the people with justice, equity, and fairness. Δικαιοσύνη has been associated with the idea of *iustitia distributiva* (distributive justice) and impartial justice. The judge is required to fulfill his duty to uphold the law and allot to each one what is his due.⁶⁶

From the ethical side, δικαιοσύνη is counted as one of the four cardinal virtues, along with *phronesis* (prudence), *sophrosune* (temperance), and *andreia* (fortitude). It usually denotes right conduct in the sense of virtue. Sometimes, δικαιοσύνη occurs as a general term for virtue.

Paul’s usage of δικαιοσύνη (justification/righteousness), however, finds its provenance in the OT notion of *ts^edhaqah* and seems to express the concept of “righteousness” or “straightness,” “justness,” “rightness”. The concept *ts^edhaqah* in the Hebrew Bible refers most basically to the characteristic of God’s nature – the unswerving inclination of his will which precedes and grounds all his acts and gifts. It emphasizes the relational aspect of God and humanity in the context of the covenant; God’s covenant faithfulness for his name’s sake: “For your name’s sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble” (Psalm 143:11).⁶⁷ To appeal to God’s righteousness was basically an appeal to God’s allegiance to his own name. God’s righteousness in the OT was not merely conforming

⁶⁵ Frank Thielman, “God’s Righteousness as God’s Fairness in Romans 1:17: An Ancient Perspective on a Significant Phrase” (Paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, November 19, 2010, Atlanta: GA), 10.

⁶⁶ Gottlob Schrenk, δικαιοσύνη, *TDNT* 2 (1991): 192.

⁶⁷ K. L. Onesti and M.T. Brauch, “Righteousness, Righteousness of God,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 827-837, esp. 829.

to distributive justice (that is, rendering strictly to each man is due), but one that includes the dimension of mercy and deliverance: “Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you” (Psalm 143:1-2). In sum, God’s righteousness provides a unity between its punitive and merciful manifestations. As the righteous God punishes, he likewise saves.

The concept of God’s righteousness, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (its nature, function and result) is central to Paul’s teaching on the justification of the sinner. For Paul, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (objective genitive) is not merely the status which God gives, imputes or imparts to faithful humans; it is not just a moral principle which God places within us. Rather, it is God’s own faithfulness (subjective genitive) to the covenant which has been unveiled once for all in Jesus the Messiah, in his death and resurrection.

The theological context of Paul’s thoughts on “justification by faith” can only be properly understood when one looks at his reflection on the relation between Jews and Gentiles. It is interesting to observe that whenever passages about “justification by faith” occur in Paul’s letter (e.g., Romans and Galatians) they are intimately connected with those dealing with Jews and Gentiles. Paul uses the phrase justification by faith as part of his apologetic to defend the place and inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian community. Thus, “justification by faith” makes sense only when seen in the wider context of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, which is part of God’s total plan for his creation.⁶⁸

C. Line of Thought in Galatians 3

⁶⁸ Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 40.

Chaos in Galatia as the historical context. Reading this emotional and intensely personal epistle gives us a glimpse of an infuriated Paul.⁶⁹ After Paul left the young Christian communities in Galatia certain Jewish Christian missionaries or intruders had bewitched his Galatian converts (cf. Gal 3:1) into believing that “if they wished to be numbered among Abraham’s descendants and share in the benefits of Israel’s Messiah they must have themselves circumcised and do the works of the Mosaic Law, especially its dietary prescriptions and Sabbath observance.”⁷⁰ Matera has imaginatively expressed what the intruders must have taught the Galatians:

We have a special relationship to Jerusalem. Indeed, Jerusalem is our mother. Therefore you must heed our gospel which is rooted in the authentic gospel preached at Jerusalem. That gospel, unlike the gospel proclaimed by Paul, requires Torah and circumcision. If you heed our gospel, you will do what the pillar apostles require of all Gentiles, for at Antioch even Peter, Barnabas, and other Jewish believers refused to share table fellowship with Gentile believers until they practiced “work of the Law.”⁷¹

In effect, these intruding missionaries by contradicting the gospel preached by Paul were saying that what Paul preached to them was a limited and incomplete version of the gospel. The intruders were accusing Paul of “neglecting to inform the Galatians that adherence to the

⁶⁹ John Buckel, “Paul’s Defense of Christian Liberty in Galatians,” *“Sharper than a two-edged sword”: Essays in Honor of Professor Dr. Jan Lambrecht S.J.*, eds. Veronica Koperski and Reimund Bieringer (Special Issue of *Louvain Studies* 17 [1992]: 254-268, esp. 255. In Gal 1:7 Paul says, “There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” In Gal 4:20 the Apostle remarks, “I am perplexed about you!”

⁷⁰ Frank J. Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 126.

⁷¹ Id., *Galatians*, 10. In the mind of these intruding missionaries, to become a Christian is to become a Jew first. All the Gentiles who want to belong to the Christian community must accept and follow all of Jewish traditions like the circumcision, Sabbath observation and dietary rules according to the Mosaic Law. See G. W. Hansen, “Letter to the Galatians,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 323-334, esp. 327.

⁷¹ Bernardita Dianzon, FSP, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2007), 150.

Torah was a prerequisite for obtaining righteousness.”⁷² This has shaken the young church’s new-found faith and hope in Christ. Paul was certainly fuming at the intruders’ proposal and passionately exhorted the bewitched Galatians to turn away from this lie. Surely when Paul established the Galatian Christian communities, he did not require them to be circumcised or adopt a Jewish way of life. “His conversion experience taught him that God had done something new in Christ which the Mosaic Law could not accomplish: it effected life-giving righteousness through the death and resurrection of Christ.”⁷³ Thus, responding to a specific crisis in Galatia, the Apostle refutes them point-by-point by arguing why it is not necessary for Gentiles to do something above and beyond what God has done. For Paul, what is at stake in the Galatian crisis is nothing less than the truth of the gospel (2:5, 14), that is, God has accomplished the work of salvation, and the proper response of the justified is trusting faith in Christ. In contrast, it seems the adversaries of Paul spoke of justification in terms of becoming a “child of Abraham” (3:7). In brief, the main point of contention between Paul and his opponents was whether or not the (Mosaic) Law was a factor in becoming a descendant of Abraham.

The Limitations of the Law. In defense of the gospel Paul preached to the Galatians, he polemically speaks harshly about the Law and shows its limitation:

O foolish Galatians! (v. 1) . . .The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? (v. 2). Are you so foolish? (v. 3). . . Well, then, does God supply you by with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (v. 5). . . For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse . . . (v. 10). Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith” (v. 11).

⁷² Buckel, “Paul’s Defense of Christian Liberty in Galatians,” 255.

⁷³ Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, 126.

Expressing it in another way, Dianzon has identified in Gal 3 the following pronouncements on the Law which have always been enigmatic to interpreters:⁷⁴

- All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse (3:10);
- No one is justified before God by the law (3:11);
- The law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise (3:17);
- God granted the inheritance to Abraham through the promise (3:18);
- The law was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made (3:19a);
- The law was not given directly by God but ordained through angels by a mediator (3:19b);
- Righteousness could not be by the law because the law cannot give life (3:21);
- The law's function as our disciplinarian was temporal - only until Christ came (3:24).

Based on what Paul is saying above, the Apostle is heavily contrasting Law (*νόμος*) with Faith (*πίστις*). God, in Paul's mind, does not justify a person on the basis of doing the works of the Law but on the basis of trusting faith in what he has accomplished through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. On the basis of this belief, Paul argues that it is not necessary for Galatian Gentiles to adopt a Jewish way of life by following the works of the Mosaic Law. In fact, they are already Abraham's descendants in Christ because they belong to Abraham's singular descendant, the Christ.⁷⁵ With Christ's appearance, the role

⁷⁴ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message*, 149-150.

⁷⁵ The reason why Paul makes use of Abraham as an example is because the intruding missionaries argued that unless the Galatians are circumcised they could not become the heirs of Abraham.

of the Law has ended. What they needed to do is persevere in their trusting faith and live according to the promptings of God's Spirit.⁷⁶

The above quotations from Paul give the impression that Paul is belittling the Law in Gal 3.⁷⁷ He seems to downgrade the Law to a level that is not really divine ("the law does not rest on faith," 3:12). Moreover, as observed by some commentators, Paul's not so favorable statements in Gal 3 about the Law are surrounded and emphasized with themes of diminution: the law's inability to give life, its being merely "added" (προστέθη, v. 19), its negative purpose ("because of transgressions," v. 19),⁷⁸ the curse associated with it (vv. 10, 13), its being a pedagogue (v. 24), which fuses with the theme of the law's transitory character, and our being held captive by the law (v. 23). Paul is nearly falling short of claiming that the law whose role is temporary has finished its work for the Christian when the offspring [Christ] came. In another Pauline letter, the Apostle states, "For Christ is the *end* of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).⁷⁹ Thus, throughout Gal 3 Paul is showing the inferiority of the works of the Law as compared to faith in Christ Jesus. Because of the foregoing, Dianzon correctly observes, "In Galatians,

⁷⁶ Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, 127.

⁷⁷ Jewish tradition pays great reverence for the Torah. The rabbis teach that the Torah existed before creation. "The people of Israel consider themselves as infinitely precious to God, and central to human history precisely because they have been given and have accepted the Torah." See Buckel, "Paul's Defense of Christian Liberty," 256. Also Eugene B. Borowitz, "Judaism. An Overview," *Encyclopedia of Religion* 8 (1987): 127-148, esp. 135-136, for a presentation of the rabbinic theory of Torah.

⁷⁸ What does Paul mean in v. 19 when he says that the Law "was added because of transgressions"? The typical explanation to this by commentators is that Law (that is, Mosaic law) "was given so as to hold in check the otherwise uncontrollable sinfulness of humanity." See Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul was not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 24; also Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 161-180. A more specific interpretation of this verse is that the law was necessary to abate the sinfulness of the Jews in particular, not humanity in general (since the Torah was specifically given to the Jews, and not to everyone).

⁷⁹ Of course, the term "end" in Greek is τέλος which could either mean "completion" or "termination" – that is, Christ completes and fulfills the law, or Christ annuls and dispenses with the law. Both senses appear to be combined in v. 4. See James R. Edwards, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans," *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 2025.

Paul's discussion of the law... has become the most controversial and hotly debated aspect of his thought."⁸⁰

Is Paul anti-Law and subsequently anti-Jews? Was his position on the Law (as opposed to justification by faith) the result of his "conversion" on the road to Damascus? The conventional understanding held by many Christians for centuries was that Paul's previous life in Judaism had been one of enslavement to the harsh structures and requirements of the Law. Paul, after his "conversion" story on the road to Damascus, eventually came to realize that trying to earn salvation by performing the works of the Law was useless because righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) came only through faith (πίστις) in Christ. Consequently, according to the commonly held view, Paul fought all who tried to subject Gentiles to the same legalistic captivity because "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law" (Gal 3:13).

Indeed, people advocating the traditional / conventional view finds in Gal 3 their defense to argue about Paul's harsh attitude toward the law. But is it enough to simply use Paul's polemic against the Law in Gal 3 as his final word about the Law?⁸¹ Such an approach would be culpable of a tendentious and uncritical reading of Paul's letters. To do so would necessarily make Paul the adversary of the Jews of his time who accord special importance to the Law (e.g., Qumran, Sadducees, Rabbinic Judaism, and even Hellenistic Judaism). Moreover, it would show that Paul became a renegade Jew after his "conversion". To continue to advance the traditional view in our time is to do Paul an

⁸⁰ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message*, 150.

⁸¹ Admittedly, Paul's statements against the Law in Gal 3 are one of the difficult readings in Paul's letters. It is in this spirit that the author of the Second Letter of Peter (3:15-16) warns us, "There are some things in them [Paul's letters] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction..."

injustice and disservice. To maintain the conventional view is to misrepresent Paul's thought on the law, and to some extent, add fuel to the already burning issue of anti-Semitism.⁸² He did not renounce his Jewishness and his zeal for the Law after he encountered Jesus Christ at Damascus. His conscience was robust.

Paul's positive valuation of the Law. Paul was not a systematic thinker. His letters are not meant to be theological tractates containing a comprehensive digest of his thoughts. They are *ad hoc*, situational letters. It is no surprising then to find his thoughts on the Law (at times) seemingly contradictory. Indications are present in his genuine letters where the Apostle expresses a positive estimation of the Law. The Law, for Paul, was God's gift to the Jews in order to help them know God's will and put it into action (Rom 2:17-18). For Paul, as Fr. Ronald Witherup carefully puts it, the Law

was not meant to become a burden but a yardstick, a way of measuring one's life in accord with God's expectations. For a time the law functioned as a disciplinarian (Gal 3:24-25 NAB and NRSV; RSV "custodian"). Its purpose was to supervise the human conduct much as a tutor oversees the behaviour of children. It was a means to make people conscious of sinfulness (Rom 3:20; 7:7). Paul does not believe that the law was intended only in literal fashion and that it demanded external conformity. ... The law was meant not only to be heard or learned by rote, but also to be put into action (Rom 2:13).⁸³

In the letter to the Philippians, Paul considers himself "flawless" as to the righteousness required by the Law (3:5-6), while in Romans, he considers the law as "holy" (7:12). In Gal, specifically chap. 3, Paul is actually trying to explain both what the Law *can* achieve and what it *cannot* accomplish for salvation.

⁸² Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message*, 150.

⁸³ Ronald D. Witherup, *101 Questions and Answers on Paul* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 147.

When does Paul view the Law negatively? First, it can be observed that Paul treats the Law negatively *only* in polemical contexts, whether with Jewish Christians (as in the case of Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11) or with Jews (2 Cor 3:4ff), in their relations with Gentile or Gentile Christians (as in Romans). Here in Galatians, Paul's seeming negative statements about the Law can be explained by the fact that Paul is addressing a Gentile audience. The Apostle is not speaking to a universal audience and he is not making categorical statements about Judaism and Law.⁸⁴ Second, Paul rejects the Law *only* if it would be antagonistic to Christ or substitutes for him. Although Paul views the Law as a principle of salvation, however it cannot claim to monopolize salvation, even though it is God's gift. For the Apostle, the Law cannot stand against Christ; it must yield to Christ. To recapitulate what Dianzon is saying, Paul's discussion of the Law in Galatians is purely a function of his dispute with his opponents regarding the basis of Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant.⁸⁵ Paul in Gal 3 is not making a theological treatise about the Law. His seeming negative and harsh statements about the Law ought to be read as a unique response to a contingent and specific situation. The whole letter to the Galatians is an *ad hoc* letter – one that is specifically responding to a concrete situation in Galatia. Inability to understand that aspect would undermine the context and circumstances surrounding the writing of the letter. “The statements that seem to denigrate the law are to be seen as a function of Paul's redefinition of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul never meant them to be construed apart from the Galatian controversy.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Eisenbaum, *Paul was not a Christian*, 217. Eisenbaum asserts that “if one only keeps in mind that Paul is consciously speaking to Gentiles, the force of his comments changes dramatically... The awareness of the Gentile audience makes all the difference.”

⁸⁵ Dianzon, *Glimpses of Paul and His Message*, 150.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

By making use of the Old Testament account of Abraham, Paul proves to the bewitched Galatians that justification comes by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. Gone were the days of the ancient world when people identified themselves by their family lines, and therefore to be a child of Abraham was a source of great pride for Jews. In Paul's redefinition of the covenant, however, identity is no longer just genetic, but a social category.⁸⁷ It is trusting faith that makes one a child of Abraham. For Paul the Abrahamic covenant is not restricted to Jews alone but extends to the Gentiles. It is through faith, and not by fulfilling the works of the law, that Gentiles as well as Jews can be justified as God's children.⁸⁸ God's promise to Abraham that he would be "the father of many nations"(Gen 17:4) has been passed on to all peoples and finally fulfilled in and through Christ Jesus, who is the singular offspring of Abraham.⁸⁹ Paul tries to show the inferiority of the works of the Law as compared to faith in Christ Jesus.⁹⁰ With the appearance of Christ the role of the Law has ended. Christ has redeemed the Galatian believers from the curse of the law. In Christ they have become Abraham's offspring and, hence, no longer need to place themselves under the law. The faith of Christ is sufficient to account them righteous.

Conclusion

By way of concluding, Paul in Gal 3 is addressing himself to Galatian Gentiles as he endeavors to clarify any misunderstanding about the Mosaic Law. In doing so, the apostle does not intend to undermine or to make light of God's Law, yet he does not want the

⁸⁷ Finlan, *The Apostle Paul and the Pauline Tradition*, 83.

⁸⁸ Philip A. Cunningham, *Jewish Apostle To The Gentile: Paul As He Saw Himself* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1986), 41.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ The reason why Paul makes use of Abraham as an example is because the intruding missionaries argued that unless the Galatians are circumcised they could not become the heirs of Abraham.

Galatian churches to view the Law as a yoke that they could not bear on their own. In redefining the “children of Abraham” Paul labors to explain that the blessings of God do not belong merely to those of Jewish descent because, through Christ’s redemptive work, all people – Jews and Gentiles alike – have come into God’s presence and have become indeed recipients of God’s covenantal promises made to Abraham. In Christ Jesus, there is no longer Jews or Greek/Gentiles; for all are one in him. If one belongs to Christ, then s/he is Abraham’s offspring (Gal 3:28-29). This is Paul’s line of thinking in Gal 3.

CHAPTER THREE

PARADIGM SHIFT IN PAULINE STUDIES:

FROM WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS TO COVENANTAL NOMISM

Neil Elliott and Mark Reasoner are right in their claim, “It has become customary in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first for scholars to speak of ‘paradigm shifts’ in our understanding of Paul.”¹ To remain impervious of the paradigm shift in Pauline studies at this point in time would be untenable and do Paul an injustice. Discussion on the role of the Law in Galatians 3 is at the center of this controversy. This chapter delves precisely on how Paul was traditionally interpreted, the deficiency of that interpretation, and the new perspective offered by recent scholars.

A. Traditional Interpretation of Paul

The traditional interpretation, which is also known as the Protestant Reformation perspective on Paul, views Paul’s writings as portraying a contest or a dispute between “grace versus works.” In this traditional image of Paul Judaism is seen a religion of works based on Torah, while Christianity is a religion of grace based entirely on faith in Christ. In here Judaism is characterized as a type of religion in which individuals are expected to “earn” their way to salvation or righteousness through works. In short, it views Judaism as a strictly legalistic religion, as compared with the “gospel” orientation of Christianity. Hence, Paul is portrayed as arguing against such a legalistic Jewish culture and claiming that the Jews are eliminated from the grace of God because of their obstinate reliance on works. Günther

¹ Neil Elliott & Mark Reasoner (eds.), *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 4. Douglas Moo, writing in 1987, likewise recognizes that “scholarship on Paul and the Law in the last ten years has witnessed a ‘a paradigm shift’ ” (“Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 [1987]: 287-307, esp. 287).

Bornkamm claims that in all of his letters “Paul’s opponent is not this or that section in a particular church, but the Jews and their understanding of salvation.”² Following this traditional interpretation, Paul used to be a Jew but rejected the fundamental tenets of Judaism once he embraced Christ on the road to Damascus. From then on, Paul had rejected the Torah and had become anti-Jewish. It has been observed that the substance of the traditional reading of Paul was his comments about the law as it is found in the commentaries of Augustine and especially Luther.³ And Galatians 3 contains some of Paul’s notorious statements about the Law. After all, was it not Paul who proclaimed Christ “the end of the law” (Rom 10:4)? How did Paul understand Jesus’ statement when the latter said that he came “not to abolish but to fulfill” the law? (Matt 5:17). The explanation given by traditional Pauline theology was Christ *fulfilled* the law only in the sense that he *superseded* it, and it is this view, attributed to Paul, that became the standard Christian view.⁴ Consequently, Christ has rendered the law antiquated and unnecessary. At worst, Christ’s replacement of the law meant that continuing adherence to it is an offense against God. Eisenbaum tells us,

From this simple assertion virtually the entire theological matrix of Christian anti-Judaism follows. ...In effect God has rejected the Jews because of their faithless disobedience and embraced the Gentiles instead. The church replaced Israel, and Christians replaced Jews as God’s chosen people.⁵

Influence of Augustine and Luther. The traditional perspective, beginning with Augustine down to Luther, understood what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus as “conversion” or “defection.”⁶ Paul used to think and live as a Jew, but now he is a converted

² Günther Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 11-12.

³ Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 208.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

⁶ See Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Segal speaks both of defection and apostasy.

Christian. This was the way Augustine and later on the Protestant Reformer Luther understood Paul.

Augustine, for one, saw his own conversion to Christianity mirrored in Paul's supposed conversion, and Paul's letters thereby became a window into the apostle's experience of transformation as well as guide for those who aspire to be truly converted to Christianity.⁷ Unfortunately, "Paul's Judaism was understood by Augustine, and therefore by Western Christianity after him, as an inferior religious option that Paul subsequently rejected when he became a Christian."⁸ In Augustine's perception, much of what Paul says in his letters was interpreted as a critique of Judaism. Subsequently, embracing Christianity necessitated the rejection of Judaism. For Augustine, Judaism was a wrong kind of religion whose members busied themselves with performing "works of law" not knowing that this gained them nothing as they stood outside the community of salvation. For Augustine, salvation comes exclusively through faith – "saved by faith not by works" – and thus the Jews were condemned since they were utterly blind to the love and mercy of God.

Even before the Protestant Reformation emerged in the 16th century the stereotyping against Jews was already widespread in Europe for centuries. The Jews, for instance, were charged of killing Christian children, drinking their blood, and baking it in *matzah* at

⁷ Augustine in Christian tradition may be credited more than anyone else with solidifying the image of Paul the convert. He himself was a convert. He came to see his own experience and Paul's as basically the same. Augustine interpreted Rom 7 as reflective of Paul's personal struggles. Like Paul, he struggled in the conflict within him between pursuing the lofty life of the spirit and the meaner enticements of the flesh. In this manner, "Augustine bequeathed to future generations the introspective conscience of the West that was to be the measure of religious, moral, and psychological authenticity" (Eisenbaum, *Paul was not a Christian*, 43). For Augustine, therefore, the function of God's law is to teach human beings humility, not how to stop sinning. Thus, according to Augustine, "rather than depend on one's obedience to law to correct one's sin, one must turn to God for help, and once one turns to God, one is *sub gratia*, 'under grace'" (see also Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian*, 45, whose main source is Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* New Series 37/1 (1986): 3-34, esp. 20-26.

⁸ Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian*, 47.

Passover.⁹ Thus, when Martin Luther, the ex-Augustinian friar, came into scene, anti-Semitism was already quite established in Europe. It can be affirmed that while Augustine was the most influential reader of Paul, Luther's reading of Paul went beyond Augustine in considerable ways. He assumed that the Jews against whose view of the law Paul was arguing held the same theology of justification as the medieval Catholicism of his time. He equated papists with Jews and saw both as the agents of the devil. Luther saw Jews as enemies of Christianity and preached about their condemnation to the flames of hell unless they were converted to Christianity. Thus, he had always prayed for the conversion of the Jews. Again, Paul was presented as the paradigm of conversion since he turned from being a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the church to being its greatest evangelist.¹⁰ There is one similarity between Augustine and Luther: Like Augustine, Luther had a transformative experience that was sparked by his reading of Paul. If Augustine was inspired by Rom 13 (vv. 13-14), for Luther it was Rom 1:17: "For the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous one shall live out of faith.'" Realizing that he was a sinner, Luther was tormented by the expression "the righteousness of God," which he believed meant God's justice, God's punishment for all sinners. The "impeccable monk" hated Paul for this biblical text since he feared condemned to eternal damnation at the Last Judgment.¹¹ Bothered by his conscience, Luther meditated on Rom 1:17 night and day until it dawned on him that the expression "righteousness of God" did not refer to God's own righteousness (i.e., not as an attribute of God), but rather to righteousness that is imputed to

⁹ See Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 297-301.

¹⁰ Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 49.

¹¹ According to Krister Stendahl, it was Luther's deeply troubled conscience that provided the structural foundation for the Protestant Reformation reading of Paul. Luther's internal struggle led him to ask the question, "How can I find a gracious God?" Luther's question, according to Stendahl, became the theological question of the day. See his article, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78-96, esp. 79, 82, 83.

the believer through faith. Thus, the righteousness of God is his mercy through which he regards us and keeps us just.¹² What, then, are the implications of this interpretation for Luther? It became apparent for Luther that Christians did not become righteous as a result of their own *good works*. Rather the Christian was the passive recipient of this righteousness. As Paul says quoting Habakkuk: “The righteous one shall live out of faith.” What Paul is really teaching, according to Luther, is that one is justified by faith in Christ, without works of the law.¹³ This realization was for Luther a tremendously comforting and liberating response since his introspective conscience had perturbed him enormously. How, then, did Luther understand Paul’s statements about the Law? For Luther, Law – which meant both the Mosaic law as well as law in general – was not the guide to living a life worthy of God. It was only designed to show human beings how hopelessly sinful they are. Law for Luther does not make human beings good. In fact the law must be rejected as a tool to enable them to become righteous. Instead they must realize their total dependence on God and trust completely that God will do what one cannot do for oneself.

It is interesting to note that even modern Jewish intellectuals (e.g., Buber) saw Paul as an apostate who betrayed Judaism. While Jesus lived and died a Jew, but Paul became the first Christian. Subsequently, there were even several Jewish interpreters of Paul who viewed

¹² Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 153-154.

¹³ Luther’s fight and resistance with the Catholic Church of his time must not be overlooked as the historical context of his interpretation of Paul. Luther then was confronted with the controversy surrounding the selling of indulgences by the Catholic Church as part of the church’s system of repentance and forgiveness. One received an indulgence by special acts of fasting, prayer, retreat, and making donations, among other things. At that time, the Church was preoccupied in selling indulgences to finance the building of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. And Luther vehemently protested to this malpractice of indulgences. Thus, issues of sin, grace, forgiveness, repentance and salvation became so critical in his thinking. See Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 51-52.

Paul as the true founder of Christianity, a view first advocated by Nietzsche, and since then followed by several others.¹⁴

What has been presented in a few paragraphs above roughly was an attempt to show that the so-called traditional understanding of Paul was very much influenced by the Augustinian-Lutheran understanding.

Critique of Augustine and Luther. Augustine and Luther's simplistic way of thinking about Paul has brought about exaggerated consequences and raised valid questions. It has elevated Paul's life as the paradigm for Christian life. He is not merely seen as *a* Christian, but *the* Christian (par excellence). In fact, his sinner-to-saint transformation became the archetype of Christian conversion. From this way of exalting Paul came the beginning of literary and theological stereotyping of Jews as steadfastly opposed to any and all who believe in Jesus. This is why Christianity has been set as antithetical to Judaism. All because of Paul's statements!

Yet the traditional interpretation is reading Paul with simplistic Reformation filters. It capitalizes so much on Paul's negative remarks about the Jewish Law, while virtually ignoring the positive ones. When one looks, however, at the entirety of Pauline letters, one recognizes his divergent statements on the Law. A serious Pauline reader experiences cognitive dissonance in his writings. Eisenbaum's evaluation of the matter is remarkable:

The traditional image of Paul carries with it rather limited expectations about what meanings can be plausibly derived from the apostle's writings. If Paul converted from Judaism to Christianity, and if the former is a religion of works based on Torah, while the latter is a religion of grace based entirely on faith in Christ, then it is difficult to imagine Paul writing in praise of Torah or articulating the privileges Jews enjoy or associating grace with Judaism.¹⁵

¹⁴ See, as examples, the works of Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul: The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002); A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: Norton, 1997); Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

¹⁵ Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian*, 31.

Indeed, Paul and his letters have suffered tendentious and selective readings which hampered objective analysis of the Apostle through the years. This prejudicial view of Judaism is untenable and morally repugnant in the eyes of many.

Moreover, unlike Augustine and Luther who were disturbed by guilty consciences, Paul had a robust conscience. Paul in his genuine letters never described what happened to him on the road to Damascus as conversion. He never suffered from a guilty conscience since, as he says in Phil 3:6, “as to righteousness under the law, he is blameless.” It is therefore a misreading to regard Paul as an apostate. Thus, in recent years, attempts have been aired to question the traditional understanding on Paul based on Augustine and Luther believing that it has done stray.

B. New Perspective on Paul

The Misunderstood Paul. Varying bible scholars since the early 1900’s were dissatisfied with the way Judaism in the New Testament era was being portrayed as being “enmeshed in legalism, whereas Paul believed salvation came by grace through faith.”¹⁶ The Holocaust in the middle of the 20th century was a turning point. As theologians and scholars began to reflect on the past from a post-holocaust perspective, some called for a critical reevaluation of Christian anti-Judaism. At the center of this effort were a handful of Protestant biblical scholars who pioneered something that would eventually be labeled the “new perspective” on Paul. These scholars claim that those in the tradition of early Protestant reformers (especially Martin Luther) misread the Apostle Paul in the light of their

¹⁶ Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 6. Works of H. J. Schoeps (*Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* [German, 1959; 1961] and W. D. Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* [1948; revised 4th ed., 1980) have challenged the traditionally negative view of Judaism and the antagonism between Paul and the Jewish-Christian apostles which Paul had been interpreted since Baur.

conflict with Roman Catholicism rather than in the content of the Apostle's own setting and concerns.¹⁷ Take for example the statements of two scholars: Bultmann and Metzger.

The Jew takes it for granted that this condition is keeping the Law, the accomplishing of "works" prescribed by the Law. In direct contrast to this view Paul's thesis runs – to consider its negative aspect first: '*without works of the Law*'. The negative aspect of Paul's thesis does not stand alone; a positive statement takes its place beside it: "*by, or from, faith.*"¹⁸

Pharisaism is the final result of that conception of religion which makes religion consist in conformity to the Law, and promises God's grace only to the doers of the law. It was the scrupulous adherence to legalistic traditions that created the Pharisaic ethos. ...In Pharisaism this natural tendency became so strong as to give rise to the modern use of the name Pharisee to describe a self-righteous for formalist or hypocrite.¹⁹

From the perspective of the traditionalists, the keeping of the Law was a burden from which Jews longed to be liberated. "By observing these commands, Jews could attempt to amass sufficient merits to outweigh the sins on the other side of the scale."²⁰ Such a characterization of Judaism as a religion of works-righteousness is a gross distortion, both in general terms and in the first century. The scholars belonging to the new emerging paradigm on Paul believe that the need to earn salvation by merit is not typically Jewish. However, such voices of protest in the beginning had little impact on Pauline scholarship and NT studies.

Already in 1961 in a famous essay entitled "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Krister Stendahl critiqued the Augustinian-Lutheran reading of Paul as being

¹⁷ For a study of these earlier views, see, for instance, George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 197-254.

¹⁸ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM: 1962), 279-280.

¹⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 41.

²⁰ Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 7.

rooted in a kind of assumed parallel between Judaism and a generic form of religion characterized by works-righteousness.²¹ This means that Judaism was associated with a type of religion in which individuals are expected to “earn” their way to salvation. Stendahl has likewise shown how the preoccupation with the inner psyche had led Christian interpreters (like Augustine and Luther) to read their own problems as if they were Paul’s problems. Since interpreters misread the problems to which Paul was responding, they utterly missed the theological answers he provided as well. Refuting that justification by faith was the main issue in Paul’s writings, Stendahl argued that it was not the eternal theological answer to a universal human problem, but a response to a particular situation involving the relationship between Jew and Gentile.²² In the same vein, N.T. Wright states, “we have misjudged early Judaism, specially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism.”²³

Eisenbaum aptly describes how Paul has been misinterpreted in order to demote Judaism:

Put simply, Christians have been misreading Paul for centuries. Worse yet, this misreading of Paul was inexorably linked to the degraded conception of Judaism that had so often led to the worst manifestations of Christian anti-Judaism.²⁴

²¹ According to Stendahl, “The Reformers’ interpretation of Paul rests on an analogism when Pauline statements about Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, Jews and Gentiles are read in the framework of late medieval piety. The Law, the Torah, with its specific requirements of circumcision and food restrictions becomes the general principle of “legalism” in religious matters. Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man’s salvation out of a common human predicament ... Paul’s argument that the Gentiles must not, and should not, come to Christ via the Law, i.e., via circumcision, etc., has turned into a statement according to which all men must come to Christ with consciences properly convicted by the law and its insatiable requirements for righteousness” (“Introspective Conscience,” in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 86-87).

²² Scholars espousing the “new perspective” on Paul have questioned the traditional Reformation understanding of the centrality of justification by faith in Paul’s theology. They argue that Paul’s doctrine of justification is merely one aspect of a larger panorama of theological themes.

²³ N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 32. Pelagianism is the belief that human will is capable of choosing good or evil without special divine aid. It affirms the ability of man to be righteous by operating a system of salvation that could be described as ‘moralism’ or ‘legalism’.

²⁴ Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian*, 60-61.

It was not until E. P. Sanders' 1977 book entitled *Paul and the Palestinian Judaism* that scholars began to pay attention to the issue raised by earlier scholars. In the description of S. J. Hafemann, "Sanders changed the course of scholarship on Paul because he succeeded in forcing scholars to rethink *fundamentally* the nature of the opposition Paul faced in his churches, and consequently the character and content of the criticism he raised against it."²⁵ In his monumental book Sanders argues that the Judaism of Paul's day (the so-called Second Temple Judaism) has been wrongly appraised as a religion in which salvation was accomplished by meritorious achievement (also known as "works-righteousness") by those in the Protestant tradition. Sanders' study aims to demonstrate that when Jewish literature was allowed to speak for itself, unaffected by the polemics of the NT and other early Christian writings, then Judaism could hardly be the legalistic system of works-righteousness that Christian scholars had for so long assumed it to be. In fact, as Sanders shows, grace plays a critical role in the Jewish concept of God and God's relationship to Israel, God's chosen people. Hence, devoting nearly four hundred pages in his book, Sanders set out "to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship."²⁶

Building on Sanders' reappraisal of Second Temple Judaism, other scholars continue to develop the issue further, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, Alan Suggate, and R. B. Hays. Dunn was the first scholar to coin the phrase "The New Perspective" in a 1983 Manson Memorial Lecture, *The New Perspective on Paul and the Law* to describe what was then an emerging new paradigm of Pauline interpretation.

²⁵ S. J. Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 666-679, esp. 673.

²⁶ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, xii.

Central Beliefs of the NPP. Although not every “New Perspective on Paul”²⁷ (NPP) scholar would agree on every point, there are some commonalities to the NPP claim(s). For one, they agree that the “grace versus works” contest is not the main issue in Paul, and perhaps not even correct. The Jew of the first century C.E. believed he was within the grace of God, and therefore a struggle between grace and works was not Jews’ concern. As already mentioned previously, the emphasis on “grace versus works” is merely a product of the polemics circulating during the Reformation period between Luther and the Catholic Church. The proponents of the NPP were championing a rethinking or re-evaluation of Paul in the light of the true beliefs of first century Judaism. In contrast to viewing Judaism as a religion of works-righteousness, they defend that Judaism is actually religion of grace. It was E. P. Sanders who coined the term “covenantal nomism” to describe the “pattern of religion” found in Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. Based on Sanders’ description,

Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.²⁸

This means that salvation was obtained not through achieving a certain number of meritorious works but through belonging to the covenant people of God. The status of God’s free election of Israel was God’s gift; it was something that could not be earned. They were made members of the elect people of God by grace alone. However, remaining properly tied to the covenant required adherence to the stipulations of the law. Hence, obedience to God’s

²⁷ The New Perspective on Paul is actually a general term referring to multiple strains of thought that have been building in England and North America for more than 30 years already. S. J. Hafemann describes it in this way: “Often at odds with one another on individual points of exegesis, these studies are unified only by their common conviction concerning the non-legalistic nature of first-century Judaism and their corresponding rejection of the traditional Reformation understanding of the Law/gospel antithesis as the key to Paul’s view of the Law and the theology of his opponents...” (“Paul and His Interpreters,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 666-679, esp. 673).

²⁸ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75.

law was not seen as legalism but a rather a living out of one's identity bestowed through the covenant.²⁹ The Law was seen by the Jews as God's wise and perfect provision to guide his people on the right path. As one writer beautifully states, the faithful Jews kept the law *not in order to be redeemed* but *because they had been redeemed* or *saved*. With this change of understanding came likewise the need to rethink Paul's view of the problem of Law.

According to NPP scholars Paul's apparent negative comments about the law should be understood primarily in the context of Paul the Jew wrestling with the question of how Jews and Gentiles stand in relation to each other with the covenant purpose of God now that it has reached its climax in Jesus Christ. Dunn, for instance, claims that the problem portrayed in the letters of Paul is *sociological* rather than soteriological, a matter of "Jew versus Gentile," not "grace versus works." It is about how the Gentile Christians can be accepted as part of the covenant community so that they too can share in the graces of God that the Jews already enjoy. In concrete, Paul was actually battling with Jews who were boasting because they were God's "elect" or "chosen ones and wanted to impose their laws on the Gentiles.

The NPP supporters claim that the best way to understand Paul's letters is to regard them as communications to specific communities of believers, not to the universal church.³⁰ The letters are *ad hoc* situational letters. Eisenbaum insightfully comments, "If he [Paul] never addressed Christians at large in his own time, then he certainly did not envision himself addressing Christians of all subsequent generations."³¹ Moreover, the primary audience of Paul's letters was Gentile Christian followers. The centrality of the Gentile Christian

²⁹ Witherup, *101 Questions and Answers on Paul*, 149. The laws that God bestows on Israel are not understood as a liability, but as a gift, the result of Israel's favored status (see Deut 4:7-9).

³⁰ Paul's letters must be contextualized within a historically plausible reconstruction of first-century Judaism.

³¹ Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian*, 61.

audience is important in understanding Paul's social world and his conceptual thinking. Given this datum, Paul's teachings about Jewish law as preserved in the letters (e.g., Gal 3) must be properly seen as teachings about how Torah *is* and *is not* applicable to Gentiles. The case of the law of circumcision is applicable specifically only to the Jewish males by virtue of the Abrahamic covenant and a matter of Jewish identity, but it is not applicable to the Gentiles since God did not and does not command Gentiles to be circumcised. Does God require the same things of all peoples at all times?

If Augustine and Luther misunderstood Paul's Judaism, what about Paul? If Jews did not believe in or practice works-righteousness, then what was Paul at such pains to oppose? Does he argue loudly against Jews who espouse justification by "works of the law"? Scholars vary in their explanations to this question. Montefiore (1894) thought that the Judaism of Paul was heavily influenced by Hellenism. On the part of H. Maccoby, on the basis of Gal 3:19 and 4:9-10, he claims that Paul's view of the law was derived from Gnosticism. Heikki Raisanen has another explanation, "In the course of his work among Gentiles he had fully internalized the Gentile point of view and identified himself with it."³² According to Sanders, "this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity."³³ For Sanders, "Paul was not trying to accurately represent Judaism on its own terms, nor need we suppose that he was ignorant on essential points. He simply saw the old dispensation as worthless in comparison with the new."³⁴

³² Raisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 258.

³³ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 552.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 551.

CONCLUSION

In the long course of Christian history it is not uncommon for scripture texts/passages to be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the agenda an interpreter of a particular epoch/situation puts into a passage. Biblical texts have been used and abused throughout history. An example of how biblical texts are misinterpreted is by ignoring the immediate context. When a passage is quoted but removed from the surrounding verses which form the immediate framework for its meaning, then it is a biblical abuse. Another form of bible distortion is the failure to consider the historical situation or context that gave rise to the text. Thus, when Paul writes a letter to a specific community, such letter is historically and contextually conditioned. An attempt to universalize that letter is a distortion of Paul's message and intention. Such distortions are found in the way Gal 3 has been interpreted in the course of history.

Paul's controversial statements about the law in Gal 3 is a classic example of how a biblical passage could be "misinterpreted, mishandled, misunderstood and misapplied in and by the Christian community"¹ because of tendentious and uncritical reading of the passage. The so-called *Wirkungsgeschichte*² of Gal 3 had elicited divergent interpretations whose ramifications are so enormous in the Judeo-Christian and Protestant-Catholic relationships.

This present study has shown us several findings and realizations worth recapitulating:

First, in Gal 3 Paul did not envision writing about a theology of the law. Hence, his apparent negative statements about the law must never be taken as universal pronouncements

¹ See Manfred T. Brauch, *Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 251.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer originally coined the term in his book *Truth and Method* published in 1960. It is a discipline that analyzes the history of a text's influences and effects. It examines the way the Bible had been interpreted in different historical eras under the influence of the concerns readers have brought to the text. Perhaps, in English, it can be translated as "reception history," "history of influence," or "history of effects." The researcher owes his gratitude to Prof. Arnold Monera for introducing him into this term.

valid anytime and anywhere since they are Paul's unique response to a very particular situation. His statements cannot stand valid outside of their specific historical context. Any attempt to twist the specific context in order to universalize them would be harmful. And this is precisely what many interpreters in the course of history have done – they have committed the error of tendentious and uncritical reading of Paul's letters and subsequently *misrepresented* the Apostle's thoughts on the law and his attitude toward his ancestral religion. Such a misreading was already there in the way Augustine understood Paul and Judaism. This misrepresentation of Paul became even more widespread during the Protestant Reformation period, beginning with Martin Luther, up to the first half of the 20th century adding fuel to the burning issue of anti-Semitism.

Second, the traditional understanding of Paul, represented by the Augustinian-Lutheran interpretation, regard the Apostle Paul as a renegade Jew, an apostate, antagonistic to fellow-Jews. Hence Paul's supposed polemics against the law (e.g., Gal and elsewhere in the genuine Pauline letters) are proofs of his conversion from his ancestral religion of Judaism to Christianity. No wonder, in Christian spirituality, Paul has always been regarded as the paradigm of conversion worth emulating. Moreover, Paul's critique of the law naturally led to the belief that the Judaism of Paul's day was a legalistic religion of works-righteousness based on the law (Torah). Judaism was contrasted to Christianity as a religion of grace based entirely on faith in Christ. Consequently, Judaism has been stereotyped as a religion in which one must *earn* salvation by compiling more good works ('merits'). In short, Judaism was presented as the antithesis of Christianity. Interpreters of Paul, from Luther down to our times, thought that the reason for Paul's denigrating reaction against the law in Gal 3 was because his opponents – the Jewish-Christian intruders – regarded the "works of the law" as a means for earning salvation and they wanted to promote the same idea among the Gentile converts in Galatia. By doing so, these intruders were sabotaging

Paul's earlier gospel proclamation that God already opened salvation to the Gentiles through faith in Christ Jesus. Luther saw in this interpretation of Paul a real ally in his clamor for reform in medieval Catholicism of his time. In the words of Sanders, it was a "retrojection of Protestant-Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism."³ For Luther, the Galatian controversy was a first century version of his own conflict against the palpable legalism in medieval Catholic Church.

Third, the traditional interpretation was the prevailing belief among Pauline interpreters till the early 20th century and it was until E. P. Sanders published his book *Paul and the Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 that paved a way for the so-called "New Perspective on Paul". The NPP scholars tried to interpret Judaism in its own terms. Sanders insists that to view Judaism as a religion of works-righteousness is based on a false methodology. They are likewise committed to re-Judaizing Paul. As Dunn writes, "Even as Apostle to the Gentiles, he still remained Paul the Jew, Paul the Israelite."⁴ Their utmost aim and intent was to do justice both to Paul and to Judaism so as to compensate for the distortions of the past. These NPP scholars are endeavoring for a complete reassessment of Paul's relationship to his ancestral religion.⁵ A careful contextual study of Paul's statements regarding the law in Galatians reveals that the Apostle was neither denouncing Judaism nor fellow-Jews because they were trying to earn salvation by faithful observance of the law. Paul was not contending against legalism in Galatia. Rather, Paul was reacting against these Jewish-Christian intruders in Galatia who were insisting that circumcision and observance of dietary laws and calendar feasts (i.e., "works of the law") were the marks of membership in the new covenant community. If these were so, then to become a full-fledged Christian one had first

³ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 57.

⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 717.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

to literally become a Jew. Paul was so passionately countering this exclusivist claim because he believed no other mark of identification was to be required in the covenant community except faith in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, Paul's discussion of the law in Gal 3 is merely serving a function of his dispute with his opponents regarding the basis of Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant. His seeming denigrating statements on the law in Gal 3 was Paul's reaction to an exclusivist definition of covenant membership along ethnic lines. The way the NPP scholars see the issue is that it is more sociological, rather than soteriological. Since Paul's statements are a specific response to a circumstance, they are not to be taken as universal pronouncements and never meant by Paul to be interpreted apart from the Galatian controversy.

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